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Account of U-2 Affair Enormously Interesting

The U-2 Affair. By David Wise and Thomas B. Ross;
Random House.

That the United States blundered horribly at a variety of levels in the U-2 affair cannot be denied by the most vigorous flag waver. One such apparent miscue was the idiot timing of Francis Gary Powers' flight from Pakistan to Norway — just before the carefully advanced Paris summit conference.

Far from being a stroke of bad scheduling, the co-authors disclose those who ran the U-2 program had very carefully considered the summit — and the possibility it might be a success.

For this reason we are called upon to believe the U-2 flight was viewed as a probable last effort in aerial intelligence. It stood to reason among the U-2 managers a lessening of tensions might cause President Eisenhower to drop the program.

Sober citizens need not have genius IQ ratings to understand the implications of this justification.

But Powers' U-2 fell to the Soviet earth near Sverdlovsk. And unlucky circumstances, plus unco-ordinated efforts, plus some very bad judgment, allowed the U.S. to impale itself on the Russian propaganda hook.

We still aren't really sure what disabled Powers' jet-powered glider at 68,000 feet on May 1, 1960. The CIA isn't telling anybody the results of its interrogation of Powers after his exchange for Russian spy Rudolph Abel.

Wise and Ross suggest the question today is academic. Soviet rockets, vintage 1962, are believed by our military to be effective at the 15-mile high range.

Crisply written, the book takes the reader from the very inception of the U-2 program through the flight, the aftermath in Washington and Moscow, Powers' trial, imprisonment and the starkly dramatic exchange of agents in a bridge in Berlin.

The disclosures add enormous interest.

During the 4 years the U-2 flew with impunity over Russia, the number of photo technicians who could process its picture findings were few. Unprocessed U-2 film sat on the shelves for months, delaying additional flights.

The CIA told newsmen the plane's destructor unit would destroy only the craft's camera. In reality, the 3 pounds of cyclonite would have ripped the plane to tiny fragments. None of the U-2 pilots knew this.

When taking off, men would lie aboard each U-2 wing. They would jump off as the plane developed speed and pull pins, detaching the wheels. The U-2 landed on wing-tip skids.

Each U-2 pilot was given a psychological test before a flight. CIA boss Allen Dulles said a later study of Powers' test results indicated to him the Virginia-born flier should have never been picked for the May 1 mission.

The rest is history.

—Dick Herman